

Transformation Through Repentance: Helping Counselees Experience True Repentance

Introduction

“The Christian life is a life of repentance.” “The two great graces essential to a saint in this life are faith and repentance.” Puritan Thomas Watson

“Every Christian grace has a counterfeit.” R.C. Ryle

What is repentance?

Metanoia = to change one's mind, i.e. to repent (to feel sorry that one has done this or that); of (on account of) something. . . used especially of those who, conscious of their sins and with manifest tokens of sorrow, are intent on obtaining God's pardon; to repent . . . to change one's mind for the better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins; a conduct worthy of a heart changed and abhorring of sins . . . (Thayer's Greek Lexicon)

“Repentance is a change of mind regarding sin and God, an inward turning from sin to God, which is known by its fruit—obedience. (Mt. 3:8; Acts 26:20; Lk. 13:5-9) It is hating what you once loved and loving what you once hated, exchanging irresistible sin for an irresistible Christ. The true repenter is cast on God. Faith is his only option. When he fully knows that sin utterly fails him, God takes him up. (Mt. 9:13b) He will have faith or he will have despair; conviction will either deliver him or devour him.” (*The Unrepenting Repenter*, Jim Elliff)

Matthew 3:1-2; Acts 2:37-38; Acts 3:19; Acts 17:30; 2 Tim 2:25-26; Rev 3:19

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this manner.” 2 Corinthians 7:10-11 (NIV)

“*Godly sorrow . . . worldly sorrow.* The former manifests itself by repentance and the experience of divine grace; the latter brings death because, instead of being God-centered sorrow over the wickedness of sin, it is self-centered sorrow over the painful consequences of sin.” (NIV Study Bible footnote)

Few Christians I have counseled were aware of this difference and how important understanding this distinction is to the Christian life and growth. We sin every day by commission or omission. Our standard of holiness is the living Word, Jesus Christ, and the written Word, Scripture. True repentance is worked by the Word and by the Holy Spirit. We can't, nor should we try to, change anyone.

Sorrow – lype - sorrow, pain, grief, annoyance, affliction (same word for godly and worldly sorrow)

“Christians, do you have a sad resentment of other things and not of sin? Worldly tears fall to the earth, but godly tears are kept in a bottle (Psa 56.8).” Puritan Thomas Watson

Examples of Counterfeit Repentance, Worldly Sorrow

- A. Esau –Hebrews 12:16-17
 - 1. Seeking repentance with tears
 - 2. He was going to Isaac, not God, for repentance
 - 3. Godless, rejected
- B. Pharaoh – Exodus 9:27-35, until the thunder stops, he sinned again; didn’t fear Lord; hardened heart. Son died, let people go, but then sent armies after the Israelites
- C. Joel 2:12-13 Rend your heart and not just your garment. Return to me
- D. Judas had troubled mind, but not repentant mind. Matt 27:3-5, Judas had sorrow (even returned 30 pieces of silver), but it led to death - hung himself.
- E. King Saul – I Samuel 15

Characteristics of Counterfeit Repentance, Worldly Sorrow

- A. Self-centered instead of God-centered – I want what I want no matter what the cost, or who I hurt, or what God says about it. Wanting own way, rather than wanting to please God and grow in Christ-likeness. Not looking to love God and others, but looking to get and take.
- B. No heart change – no sanctifying change.
 - Matthew 15:8 “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”
 - Jeremiah 3:10, v. 6-13 “her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to me with her whole heart, but in pretense [‘lie’ in Hebrew].”
- C. Self-pity – Sorry about losing something temporal. “Now I won’t be able to _____.” Sorry they got caught. “I can’t believe I did that.” -- Not understanding Gospel and man’s capacity to sin, thus need for the Savior; not humbling self and turning to God for forgiveness and mercy.
- D. Making excuses – “God wants me to be happy,” “You don’t know how hard it is.”
- E. Minimizing – “At least I didn’t . . .”, “I’m not as bad as . . .”, “God doesn’t expect me to be perfect”, “Can’t we just move on?”
- F. Rationalizing -- “I have needs”, “He’s a Christian and we pray together, so it’s okay to _____.”
- G. Blame-shifting – “If you wouldn’t do _____, I wouldn’t lose my temper.”, “You weren’t paying attention to me.” Sometimes accuse others of that which they are guilty, instead of confessing and repenting.
- H. Manipulation – Tell me what hoops to jump through (what to do) to get back to where we were, so you’re not mad at me, so I don’t have to lose anything, etc.
- I. Resentment – “Because of you, I have to break up with my mistress.”, “Because you called the police, now I have a bad mark on my record.”
- J. Regret – “I had to give him up to save my marriage.”, “If I hadn’t confessed, I would still have my job.”

- K. Angry at the consequences, others and self, and God; but not at the sin
- L. Hiding, cover-up – “Please don’t tell anyone.” Not willing to give passwords, hiding information and activities, letting others take the fall/blame for their sin.
- M. Temporary, with empty promises (Kiss and make up syndrome)
- N. Not willing to make necessary changes or sacrifices
- O. Lack of concern or care for God and others
- P. May change for the love of family, friends, job, but heart is not for the Lord. Lot’s wife left with family but looked back, left her heart. (Gen. 19:12-26; Lk. 17:32)

Serious Consequences for an Unrepentant Heart

- A. God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. James 4:5-10; I Pet 5:5-6
- B. Worldly sorrow leads to death 2 Cor 7:10
- C. “Do not be deceived. God will not be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.” Gal 6:7
- D. May not be saved. Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.’” Matt 7:15-23, esp. 21-23
- E. No growth or change; bound to repeat same sin, often getting progressively worse

Examples of Godly Sorrow Leading to True Repentance

- A. Peter – Repented and returned to Jesus - Matt 26:75. Later emboldened by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to lead others to repentance - Acts 2:14 - **38**
- B. The Prodigal Son – confessed sin against heaven and his father. Ran to his father. Lk 15:18-21
- C. Thief on the cross – saw himself guilty & Jesus as the innocent Messiah. Lk 23:40-43
- D. King David
 - a. His sin, confession, and repentance - 2 Samuel 12:1-14; Psalm 51
 - b. God said David was a man after His own heart. Acts 13:22; I Kings 11:4

Characteristics of Godly Sorrow Leading to Repentance (what godly sorrow will produce in you)

- A. Motivated by and oriented toward God, rather than self
- B. Turns *from* sin and *to* God Acts 3:26 & 26:20
“God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Act 3.26).
- C. Sorrow over sin which grieves the Holy Spirit and dishonors our holy, loving and good God
- D. Sorrow for bringing shame to His name
- E. Sorry that we hurt others by sinning, but second to our sorrow over grieving God
- F. Sorrow for disrupting relationship with God and choosing self and idols over Him
- G. Sorrow is abiding – habitual and continual, not temporary and fleeting
- H. Confesses, rather than hides Proverbs 28:13 – “He who conceals his sins does not prosper; but whoever confesses and forsakes them finds mercy.”
- I. Fully owns and takes responsibility for sin by admitting specific sins without making excuses, blaming, or minimizing

- J. Humbles one's self and asks forgiveness of God and others
- K. Is willing to do whatever it takes to make things right, no matter what the cost
 - Radical amputation: Matthew 5:27-30
- L. There is heart change and a subsequent behavior change

What Godly Sorrow Will Produce in You (2 Cor 7:11, from Bible Hub; Strong's and Thayer's)

- A. Earnestness – “For the believer *spoudé* ("speedy diligence") means *quickly obeying* what the Lord reveals is *His priority*. This elevates the *better* over the good – the *more important* over the important – and does so with *earnest swiftness* (intensity)”
- B. Eagerness to clear yourselves - *apología* - properly, a well-reasoned reply; a *thought-out response* to adequately address the issue(s) that is raised.
- C. Indignation – *aganaktésis*- feeling of anger, indignation, vexation.
- D. Alarm - *phóbos* ("fear") means *withdraw* (*separate* from), i.e. flee (remove oneself) and hence to *avoid* because of *dread*(*fright*).
- E. Longing - *epithésis* - eager longing (desire), strong affection
- F. Concern – *zelos* - [The root (*zē-*, "zeal") literally means "hot enough to *boil*." It is metaphorically used of "burning anger, love, zeal" (A-S) – i.e. *to burn* (*in spirit*). It can refer to "*boiling anger, love, zeal*, for what is good or bad".
- G. Readiness to see justice done - *ekdíkēsis* – properly, judgment which fully executes the core-values (standards) of the *particular* judge, i.e. extending *from* the inner-person of the judge *to* its out-come (outcome).
- H. To be innocent in this matter - *hagnós* (an adjective, which may be cognate with *hágios*, "holy") – properly, *pure* (to the *core*); *virginal* (chaste, unadulterated); *pure inside and out*; *holy* because *uncontaminated*(undefiled from sin), i.e. without spoilation even within (even down to the center of one's being); not *mixed* with guilt or anything condemnable.

Contrast King Saul's Counterfeit Repentance with King David's True Repentance

- A. Saul – 1 Samuel 15; v. 9 - unwilling to carry out Lord's instructions, v. 13 - lied, v. 15 - blamed and justified, v. 20 - lied, v. 21 – blamed and rationalized, v. 24 – fear of man/people pleasing, v. 30 – save face/cover up, v. 35 – Samuel mourned for him, the Lord grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel.
- B. David - 2 Samuel 12:1-14 Experiences conviction and repentance upon the prophet Nathan's confrontation; Psalm 51 Against you and you only have I sinned, create in me a pure heart; Acts 13:22; I Kings 11:4 – The Lord said David was a man after His own heart; Psalm 51 (David's Psalm of Repentance)
- C. Counselee - Evaluate self, with a view toward godly sorrow leading to repentance, by comparing your response to sin and repentance to Saul's and David's (homework)

(Thomas Watson, Puritan, quotes from *The Doctrine of Repentance*, www.onthewing.org)

HOMEWORK:

“True Repentance and Its Impact” worksheet by Brad Bigney; Download *Repentance Worksheet on 2 Cor 7* under ‘Guilt and Repentance’, <https://bradbigney.wordpress.com/guilt-and-repentance>.

See also “The Unrepenting Repenter” by Jim Elliff from same website. Have counselee read and highlight. Record how they will apply and what changes they will make.

Have counselee compare and evaluate their repentance to Saul’s and David’s (I Samuel 15; 2 Samuel 12:1-14 and Psalm 51.)

Counsel the necessary issues once the sin is confessed, i.e., pride, adultery, lust, manipulation, etc. Give appropriate homework for those issues/sins.

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